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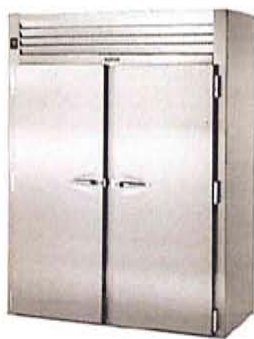


Tools of the Trade

Striking Gold

Gadgets, gizmos and gear of all types are putting smiles on the faces of school nutrition professionals across the country.

BY PATRICK WHITE



Give a young child a brand-new toy, and you almost certainly will see on his or her face a sense of fascination and wonder that far exceeds the actual merits of the toy itself. Wouldn't it be nice if every new product purchase gave us adults that same sense of amazement? Too often, instead of being fascinated by even the highest-tech item, we're prone to critique what we *don't* like about it—"the battery life is too short," "the buttons aren't in the same place as my old model," etc., etc. And our sense of wonder usually extends about as far as, "I wonder how long it will last before it breaks?"

So it's a testament to the value of a product these days when you hear someone *really* rave about it. *School Nutrition* asked a number of school nutrition professionals to tell us about some of the new products—large or small, high-tech or low—that they've added, with great delight and satisfaction, to their operations.

Powerful Products Rochester (Minn.) Public Schools recently renovated a large middle school kitchen, serving "over 600 students daily with four serving lines. All the old equipment and serving lines were replaced," explains Sherri Knutson, SNS, school nutrition director, reporting that her staff at that school rave about two new products in particular. "We love the new combi-oven (a model from RATIONAL). We have waited 19 years for it, and it is the best equipment that we have ever used! The end product looks and tastes so much better than [what's cooked in] the traditional convection ovens. We also love the new double-stack steamer from Vulcan. The veggies and pasta come out perfect," Knutson details.

She's also been impressed by the performance of a roll-in, double-door refrigerator and a double-door freezer (both manufactured by Traulsen) that were added in the kitchen. "These are perfect for pre-panning food items and holding temperatures," she notes of the flexibility provided by this equipment.

Donna Roy, SNS, school nutrition director for Pembroke (N.H.) School District, is enthused about a newly purchased combination serving unit, a Thurmaduke model from

Duke Manufacturing that offers a cold well on the bottom and a heating unit on the top. "This allows us to merchandise both hot and cold items in the same amount of space. In the past, this would have been two separate units taking up twice the amount of space," Roy explains, adding that she intends to talk with her equipment rep about possibly converting the high school's five-well salad bar to include a heated top section. "I need to expand my 'hot' space...so that I can expand my reimbursable meals," she notes.

Tech Check Operators are enthusiastic about cutting-edge technology innovations, too. "We have fully implemented multiple programmable TV screens [from LG] as menu boards at all of our 13 secondary sites, which our site supervisors enjoy" both for helping to manage student traffic control and announcing menu items at each serving line, explains Allison Bradford, SNS, child nutrition programs director for Anoka-Hennepin (Minn.) Schools. Also, she says, "We are currently working with the Nutrislice software system to enhance our website menu presence, [offering] nutritional information and providing parents and students with the menu app" for smartphones.

Another high-tech experiment that is paying off involves the use of touchscreen technology for the operation's point-of-sale (POS) system, which Bradford says is proving to be easy to use and helping move students more quickly through the serving lines. The district works with PCS Revenue Control Systems, using the company's 3D-POS Terminal Software along with touchscreen technology manufactured by TekVisions (the



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wired SilenTouch II and the wireless Lightning models).



Simple Solutions Even simple tools can be exciting! Proof of that is the sterling recommendation made by Roxanne Knops, nutrition services manager at Willow

Lane Elementary School in White Bear Lake, Minn., about the “fantastic!” Klever Kutter box cutters that she just discovered. “They are disposable, so there’s no need to change dull blades,” she details. “And they have a recessed blade, which prevents costly injuries. The unique design prevents damage to carton ingredients. And, they are dishwasher safe, which prevents cross-contamination!”

Two different simple-but-effective products are proving to be a hit in Shawnee Mission (Kan.) School District. “To help keep our employees safe, we have purchased Kevlar sleeves [models are available from many different suppliers] that keep employees’ arms from being burned when using the combi or convection ovens,” explains school nutrition director Nancy Coughenour, SNS. “Also, we have purchased rubber hot pads [made by San Jamar]. We no longer have to worry about wet hot pads, as these can be used wet or dry, plus they are able to be washed in the dishmachine.”

Leah Schmidt, SNS, school nutrition director at Hickman Mills C-1 School District in Kansas City, Mo., and 2013-14 SNA President, has been especially impressed by a basic product that is proving to be a real time-saver. “It’s a rolling cart from Prairie View Industries that uses bus tubs for shelves, and we use these as utensil carts. We buy an extra set of bus tubs and switch them out weekly, or as needed, which makes it easier to clean than cabinet drawers,” she says. Staff can roll the equipment to wherever prep is being handled for easy access to the utensils, and when they leave for the day, they can wheel the cart into a secured storeroom, reducing a former need for replacements when utensils would be “borrowed” by others in the building.

Marilyn Moody, SNS, senior director of child nutrition services

for Wake County (N.C.) Public School System, points to two less-glamorous pieces of equipment that she says make a huge difference in her program:



The first is a ¼-cubic-yard tilt cart by Contico that is used to transfer numerous trash bags to the dumpster site in a single trip; the second is a cash-counting machine (a Cashmaster International model by Profit Solutions) used at her middle and high school sites. “This cuts labor hours for the people who do the bank deposits daily,” she notes. “They are especially valuable if you have numerous vending machines.”

Food Prep’s Greatest Hits At Albert Lea (Minn.) Schools, School Nutrition Director Mary Nelson has been eyeing food processors, such as those from Robot Coupe, which are heavy duty and can handle heavy use. “Each kitchen would love to have a food processor to help with the chopping and prepping of the raw vegetables and fruits that are now an integral part of our menus. It would save on labor time and also on the physical wear and tear of our employees,” Nelson reports. Unfortunately, “Finding the money in the budget is the challenge,” she adds.

Not far away, Mary Anderson, school nutrition director at Wayzata (Minn.) Public Schools, already puts Robot Coupe food processors to work in her program: “We are more actively using them to chop and shred fresh vegetables and fruits.” Another kitchen gadget Anderson says is proving very helpful are short-handled spoodles. “These have helped the elementary students to self-serve fresh fruit and vegetable items,” she explains.

A new serving line component has just been added at Wallingford (Conn.) School





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Some of Their Favorite Things

Following is a list of companies whose products are mentioned in this article:

- **Contico**
www.continentalcommercialproducts.com
- **E-Control Systems**
www.econtrolsystems.com
- **Impinger**
www.lincolnfp.com
- **Klever Cutter**
www.kleversales.com
- **LG**
www.lg.com
- **Low Temp Industries**
lowtempind.com
- **Nutrislice**
www.nutrislice.com
- **PCS Revenue Control Systems**
www.pcsrscs.com
- **Piper Products**
piperonline.net
- **Prairie View Industries Food Service**
www.pvifs.com
- **Profit Solutions**
www.p-s-g.com
- **Randell**
www.unifiedbrands.net
- **RATIONAL**
www.rational-online.com
- **Robot Coupe**
www.robot-coupe.com
- **San Jamar**
www.sanjamar.com
- **TekVisions**
www.tekvisions.com
- **Traulsen**
www.traulsen.com
- **Vitamix**
www.vitamix.com
- **Vulcan**
www.vulcan.com
- **Waring Commercial**
www.waringcommercialproducts.com



District, and it has the school nutrition team excited. "My staff is looking forward to using the multifunction steamtable manufactured by Low Temp Industries with wells capable of hot and cold functionality," reports Sharlene Wong, SNS, school nutrition director. "It can maintain temperatures for hot, cold or even frozen food. We also like the attractive, unique sneezeguards that incorporate a small clear shelf above the steamtable wells. These shelves are handy for things like holding bread or roll baskets when we have a sandwich bar."

Wong says the staff plans to use the steamtable to serve soup, sandwiches, salad and pasta. It also can act as an Asian noodle or rice station. "This gives my high school staff added security for HACCP compliance, because the wells have the multi-functionality. They don't have to worry about the food being maintained at the proper temperature while serving both hot and cold food items side by side," she notes. Other future applications include a taco station or Southwest grill, serving hot taco meat or seasoned chicken strips right next to the chilled toppings.

Jane Hentzler, SNS, director of nutrition services at Lee's Summit (Mo.) School District, is a big fan of combi-oven technology, not limiting herself necessarily to a single brand. "I would recommend using them in high production schools that are cooking to the line. This single piece of equipment can take the place of steam jacketed kettles, steamers and convection ovens," she explains. "These are particularly popular in our older kitchens that don't have that much square footage. Plus, the quality of product is far superior."

Carol Sykes, SNS, child nutrition director with Dare County (N.C.) Schools, is grateful for a product tip she recently received. "Another area director mentioned that she had started providing managers with NSF-approved immersion blenders to prepare puréed special diets," she explains. Sykes purchased the Waring Commercial Quick Stik Model WSB33X. "[They] are a

less-expensive alternative to a commercial blender or food processor," she reports, saying they have proven to work very well when puréeing fruits, vegetables and other foods needed for finely blended special diets.

"Equipment always fascinates me, so I love to be on the cutting edge and test new pieces in the field," says Debbie Mobley, SNS, school nutrition director at Clarksville-Montgomery County (Tenn.) Schools. In particular, she cites blast chillers from Randell as a difference-making discovery for her schools. "They cut down on the cool-down time before placing food in the cooler or freezers; they're just a great invention, as the food is not left out in the danger zone for extended periods of time." A blast chiller can be a pricey purchase, she acknowledges, but one that is worth it.



Mobley also has high praise for the E-Control Systems temperature monitoring system recently installed on the district's freezers and coolers. "Each year in the past, we have lost food during summer or holiday seasons when we're out of school, because no one was monitoring the freezers or coolers. The [technology] cost us approximately \$30,000, but has paid for itself this year, as we have been notified of problems in time to move food," she reports.

Another tool discovery that's impressed Mobley is a vegetable slicer from Piper Products. "It is definitely a labor-saving piece and has many great functions," she details, explaining its virtues when prepping farm-to-school harvests. "We could slice, dice, cube, strip and shred in no time."

Game Changers A new conveyor pizza oven from Impinger has been a big hit at Gates Chili, East Rochester and East